

**Narrator: Naree Prosperie**  
**Interviewer: Darcy Wilkons**  
**Transcriber: Joshua Coen**

**14<sup>th</sup> November, 2013**

**DARCY WILKONS:** My name is Darcy Wilkons. I'm interviewing...

**NAREE PROSPERIE:** Naree.

**WILKONS:** ...Naree...about her memories and experiences concerning the Louisiana coastal wetlands. The interview is being conducted at, um, 3:05 PM on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The interview is being conducted at Bayou Terrebonne Water Life Museum in Houma. Do you understand that portions of this taped interview or pictures taken during the interview may be used in a publication?

**PROSPERIE:** [00:39] Mhm.

**WILKONS:** Okay. Thank you for speaking with us today. Now that we have gone over the consent forms and stuff, I would like to get some basic info from you. Would you please state your full name?

**PROSPERIE:** Naree Prosperie.

**WILKONS:** Okay. Um, what's your birthdate and where were you born?

**PROSPERIE:** [00:57] October 21<sup>st</sup> '39 born in Terrebonne Parish.

**WILKONS:** Okay. Um, where did you grow up?

**PROSPERIE:** In Chauvin.

**WILKONS:** Okay. Um, and have you always lived there? Did you move around?

**PROSPERIE:** No ma'am. Always did live there.

**WILKONS:** Always been from Chauvin? Um, okay, well can you tell me some childhood memories that have connected you to the Louisiana wetlands?

**PROSPERIE:** Well we remember we used to go to the islands: Last Island or Wine Island or one of those. But now there's no more of that. That's gone.

**WILKONS:** What did you do on the islands?

**PROSPERIE:** We'd go looking for shells and just walk the island.

**WILKONS:** What...they're called Lasa?

**PROSPERIE:** Last Island and Timbalier Island...but I don't believe...there's nothing left there. It used to have a big statue of the busted mother, but I don't know if she's still there.

**WILKONS:** Interesting. How often did you go to them?

**PROSPERIE:** When we were little, maybe once a year. That was our vacation for one day.

**WILKONS:** Um, did you, you know do anything else? Did you do a lot of fishing?

**PROSPERIE:** [02:18] Yeah, the...fishing and swimming in the bayous.

**WILKONS:** Okay. Ever scared of alligators?

**PROSPERIE:** Not there, no. We weren't scared in those days.

**WILKONS:** Yes. Okay.

**PROSPERIE:** We used to go in the marsh. We used to go in the woods.

**WILKONS:** Hunting?

**PROSPERIE:** Not really, just maybe...uh, my brothers would hunt but I never hunted, just would walk...we'd walk in the woods a lot, pick up blackberries, whatever.

**WILKONS:** Wow, okay. So how have the wetlands changed over your lifetime?

**PROSPERIE:** [02:53] A whole lot. Because we used to go to Cocodrie at the end of the road and they had a lot of land. Now...and...now the water is all the way up to Boudreaux canal. And that's...that's a big change. And I'm, uh, 73 and I haven't been down there in maybe two years and the last time I went water was everywhere. So we're losing a lot of our marsh.

**WILKONS:** Yeah.

**PROSPERIE:** And a lot of the lands, people have their camps but eventually something's not done, they gonna have to have those house boats like years ago.

**WILKONS:** Mhm. Do you, um, what do you think should be done? Or can anything be done?

**PROSPERIE:** I don't know. What could stop the water? There's more water now than they got land. I don't think there's nothing that's gonna stop it. I hope our levees that they made would stop the people from flooding. But eventually that's not gonna work. That's my opinion.

**WILKONS:** Yeah no, I think most people would agree with you.

**PROSPERIE:** [04:20] Well, I know from the time that I remembered and the time now, what I'm seeing now, give another twenty years, I don't know what we gonna see. Just like that picture with the cemetery they all got up there. That used to be all on land and, see, they actually in the marsh now.

**WILKONS:** Yeah, someone else we interviewed was talking about how land when he was a kid that used to be grazing land for cows is water.

**PROSPERIE:** Oh yes. Mhm. They had a lot of cows, but you don't see that anymore.

**WILKONS:** So you experienced...you saw the cows?

**PROSPERIE:** Oh yes. Definitely.

**WILKONS:** I heard that the first cowboys actually, um were in Louisiana.

**PROSPERIE:** Ooh! We didn't see any cowboys where we were.

**WILKONS:** Um, okay, do you...our organizations is CWPPRA. Have you ever heard of it?

**PROSPERIE:** No ma'am.

**WILKONS:** Okay, CWPPRA is Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act. And so...basically what they do is public outreach about wetlands and trying to teach people, you know, of the plight of Louisiana and what's going on here environmentally. So, do you think things like CWPPRA are important?

**PROSPERIE:** Yes it is.

**WILKONS:** Yeah?

**PROSPERIE:** [05:45] Now you were talking about something else. My great grandfather died when he was 95. He used to ride horse and buggy to Last Island. And the islands they had out in the gulf. Now the island: the water's almost to Boudreaux canal. Can you imagine riding horse and buggy all the way to the island?

**WILKONS:** No way. That's awesome. Do you have any pictures and stuff of that kind of thing? Like at your house at all?

**PROSPERIE:** No I don't think I have that. I can look through my mother's old pictures but we might have something, but not of the island, you know.

**WILKONS:** Right, right. That's very interesting. Okay, so in your opinion if we didn't have coastal restoration projects, do you think we would be worse off? Like, what would happen if we didn't have...

**PROSPERIE:** [06:50] It would get worse. They're trying everything they can. But, like I say they got more water than land.

**WILKONS:** Yes. Um, so have you ever been engaged in any coastal restoration activities? Like, been an activist or done your part to help things slow down? Or as the, I mean...they're probably...unless you're involved in something like this, they're probably have no opportunities for that.

**PROSPERIE:** No.

**WILKONS:** Um, okay. If you could go back, you know maybe to your grandfather's time or something, what would you tell previous generations about wetlands? What would you tell your generation, even, that might help nowadays? That might change what's going on now?

**PROSPERIE:** Uh, right now I'm not thinking.

**WILKONS:** It's okay! It's kind of a complicated question.

**PROSPERIE:** I would tell my children to get involved in it, you know, because they live down here. They live in Houma. My oldest daughter is sort of involved in something cause she's a deputy and she knows what's going on. She hears it every day at the courthouse.

**WILKONS:** Yeah. Okay. Um, so...I mean, that's basically you know, most of the interview. Our last question is, um what is the message you would want viewers to take away from our discussion? You know, why is this stuff important? You know, in summation, what is your view of Louisiana's wetlands and the problems surrounding it?

**PROSPERIE:** Explain that again.

**WILKONS:** Okay, if you could give people listening to your interview one message to take back. You know, maybe people who aren't from Louisiana who have no idea what's going on here, what would you tell those people about Louisiana and the wetlands?

**PROSPERIE:** [09:05] Well I would tell them that they outa travel out here to see the wetlands cause they got some beautiful scenery and beautiful things in the swamps and in the wetlands itself. We went on an airboat ride and...you know, go take a boat and go out there and look for yourself.

**WILKONS:** Do you think Louisiana's wetlands are important to the nation as a whole?



**PROSPERIE:** [09:34] I think so, but Louisiana can't fight alone. But we're not the only state that's fighting the wetlands. We have probably Texas and Alabama. They all...But, it look like Mississippi's beaches don't get eroded like ours did. Well, they might because they got a beach in Biloxi, Cat Island, or something.

**WILKONS:** Actually, my family goes to Horn Island a lot. Horn Island and Round Island are off the coast of Mississippi and they're...

**PROSPERIE:** It's almost gone.

**WILKONS:** It's almost gone, yes. Just little slivers of land where it used to be.

**PROSPERIE:** Well if we havin' some more bad storms here, it's gonna be bad because we don't have no more protection. They levees might hold off. That's the only thing that's helping us, is the levees. But in days to come, the next generation, will they find something better? Or make them higher?

**WILKONS:** Yeah, have you heard about the um, any of the Mississippi diversion plans?

**PROSPERIE:** Nu uh.

**WILKONS:** I always wonder what locals think about...I mean, there's a big plan to divert a section of the Mississippi somewhere else so that it would deposit sediment.

**PROSPERIE:** [11:10] Oh, I saw that on T.V. I watched that. Yes. They did make some land out by the islands cause I saw them...the big machine throwing sand.

**WILKONS:** Yeah. So I think things can be done but the rate at which things are disappearing we would really have to...

**PROSPERIE:** ...to really work at it and do that.

**WILKONS:** Indeed. Well, is there anything else you'd like to talk about? Any favorite memories you want to share?

**PROSPERIE:** Y'all caught me off guard.

**WILKONS:** [Laughs] That's perfectly...this has been a great interview so...that's.

**PROSPERIE:** When we would go to the island. When they take us once a year, we had to go in a shrimp boat. And in a shrimp boat, you had a big hole where they put the ice and, um, this is where we had to stay until we got to the island. And put about 10 kids in there.

**WILKONS:** Was there ice in there?

**PROSPERIE:** [12:15] No, it was empty. But they wouldn't let us come out and then my aunt would tie us with rope so that we wouldn't fall overboard. We laugh at it today but I think were at...see we were at four, there might have been 10 of us in the family. But you couldn't get out. They would not let us get out until we got to the island.

**WILKONS:** Old fashion child rearing.

**PROSPERIE:** That's it.

**WILKONS:** Before life jackets I suppose.

**PROSPERIE:** Well we used to go the island and pick up those shells. That was so much fun. And the things that we found, you not gonna find that today.

**WILKONS:** Yeah, I find more boots and bottles.

**PROSPERIE:** Mhm, Bottles.

**WILKONS:** What did you find that...

**PROSPERIE:** [13:08] We found some beautiful shells. Something that you don't see anymore. And when you go to Mississippi where they have all those shells that they selling, it aint nothing like what you find on the beach.

**WILKONS:** Yeah. Wow. That sounds wonderful. I wanna go there! Back in time!  
Well, thank you so much.

**PROSPERIE:** Well, that was fun. You very welcome.

**WILKONS:** Well thank you so much on behalf of CWPPRA and the T. Harry Williams Center.

**PROSPERIE:** Well Ima have to learn more about CWPPRA . I aint ever heard about it.

**WILKONS:** Yeah, um, I wonder if we have any flyers or anything; business cards or something.

**COLE RUCKSTUHL:** We do.

**WILKONS:** Yeah, we can give you a business card and you can look up their website.

**PROSPERIE:** My daughter can do that.

**WILKONS:** Yeah! Well thanks so much. This was great. We're definitely...we'll contact you possibly if we want to do, you know, a more in depth interview at some point.

**PROSPERIE:** [14:07] Mhm. I wish my mother would still be alive. She died at 95, two years ago. Her memory was like this. I can't remember...I forget what Ima tell you when I get home.

**WILKONS:** It was nice to meet you.

**PROSPERIE:** You two. Y'all have a good day

**WILKONS:** Thank you!

**[Tape Ends 14:30]**